



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# My USDA

## A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

January 2011  
Volume I, Issue 3

### USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT  
AND RETENTION
- TALENT  
MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE  
DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS  
AND COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH

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### A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

I want to begin this new year by reminding you how important your job is as an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In the bustle of our daily work, we can easily forget that we are making the nation's food supply more abundant and safe, we are preserving and protecting our natural resources, and we are ensuring that infants and children across the country are receiving much needed food and nutrition. These are just a few of the many accomplishments we can claim at USDA, and I want you to know I appreciate your dedication and commitment.

The USDA is a great Department, and the ongoing Cultural Transformation is designed to send a very powerful message to everyone who works here: Your work is important, and I want you to understand the value of what you do. You should be proud of the positive difference you're making in the lives of all Americans.

If we are to continue being effective public servants, we must have a work environment that is conducive

to excellent performance. Improving worklife is one of the goals of USDA's Cultural Transformation, and this issue of My USDA includes information on how we are accomplishing that.

We are hiring more individuals with disabilities, and we are hiring more veterans, including disabled veterans. We are providing greater opportunities for advancement through the new Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SES CDP). We are creating a safer and more inclusive work environment for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees. Our telework program is expanding, and we have completed the first of a series of employee surveys to chart our progress in transforming the culture of the Department.

Details about these initiatives and more are inside this issue, and I urge you to read about them and become informed about the changes underway at



USDA. As always, I encourage you to provide feedback and offer your suggestions for further improvements. You can reach the staff of My USDA by email at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov). (<http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov>)

I want us all to think of USDA as a community, and, together, we can appreciate the value of the work we do throughout the Department. Public service is a noble calling, and your good work should make you proud.

**Thomas J. Vilsack**  
Secretary

### USDA ANNOUNCES SES CANDIDATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (CDP)

The [Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program \(SES CDP\)](#) has been announced on USA-Jobs.

Details about how to apply are outlined at this link. The USDA SES CDP is designed to provide a broad range of developmental activities, coupled with formal training, to enhance individual executive competencies and to increase awareness and understanding of public policy, programs, and issues. Selection into the program is competitive.

The application process progresses through a series of phases with each phase asking applicants to demonstrate selected competencies. Only the highest rated applicants from each phase will progress to the next phase. A diverse group of candidates will help USDA meet succession planning goals. Candidates who successfully complete the program and are certified by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will be eligible for noncompetitive appointment into SES positions for which they are otherwise qualified. However, successful program participation does not guarantee placement in any SES position. The [vacancy announcement](#) closes on February 14, 2011. If you have questions about the SES CDP, send them to the email box [USDASESCDP@dm.usda.gov](mailto:USDASESCDP@dm.usda.gov).

*Cultural Transformation (CT) is the process of creating a workplace where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect and provided the opportunity for success.*

## USDA TRAINING OFFICERS AND HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL ATTEND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION TRAINING

Written by Dr. Karlease Kelly, Provost, USDA Virtual University

In December 2010, a group of interested and enthusiastic USDA Training Officers and Human Resources professionals met in Philadelphia to attend a course sponsored by the Wharton Institute of Executive Education to learn more about effectively leading cultural transformation across the Department. Prior to this session, members of the Cultural Transformation Task Force met with representatives of Wharton to share information about USDA's progress and to plan the curriculum, agenda and plot the strategic deliverables for the event. More than 40 participants from across USDA joined the week-long session and learned about the following topics:

- ◆ The reasons for cultural transformation
- ◆ The business case for change
- ◆ Who leads the change process
- ◆ Developing cultural competencies
- ◆ Recognizing and responding to the changing needs of customers
- ◆ Understanding the changing demographics in agriculture
- ◆ Rolling cultural transformation out to the field
- ◆ Developing Agency training plans, and
- ◆ Measuring change over time.

The course included case studies, hands-on exercises,



guest speakers from organizations that have successfully gone through cultural transformation, facilitated discussions, and presentations by both individuals and small working groups that included room for participant feedback and input along the way. By the end of the course, participants successfully drafted a comprehensive Agency training plan that will be implemented in 2011.

To learn what some of the participants had to say about the training, go to page 10 of this issue of My USDA.

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**"...As contentious and frustrating and messy as our democracy can sometimes be, I know there isn't a person here who would trade places with any other nation on Earth. We may have differences in policy, but we all believe in the rights enshrined in our Constitution. We may have different opinions, but we believe in the same promise that says this is a place where you can make it if you try. We may have different backgrounds, but we believe in the same dream that says this is a country where anything's possible. No matter who you are. No matter where you come from. That dream is why I can stand here before you tonight."**



**President Barack Obama**

**State of the Union Address, January 26, 2011**

## Cultural Transformation Action Item: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

### FEDERAL HIRING REFORMS: LISTENING TO USDA EMPLOYEES

FOUR HIRING SATISFACTION SURVEYS RUN BY THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT PROVIDE KEY INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS IN HIRING REFORM

On October 1, 2010, OPM launched new surveys to federal Departments and Agencies to collect and measure key information necessary to implement hiring reform initiatives and improve HR processes. The surveys are short, and they take only minutes to complete. They gather feedback from four groups to measure the level of satisfaction with the hiring process.

Written by Anita Adkins, Director  
Human Resources Policy Division and  
Allen Hatcher, Director  
Strategic HR Planning and Accountability

#### ***Abandoners Satisfaction Survey***

- ◆ The *Abandoners Satisfaction Survey* reaches out to those who “abandon” the application process or for some reason do not complete their application. This survey focuses on satisfaction with the application process. As of September 30, 2010, 67 percent of the applicants who abandoned the application process reported being satisfied with the job application process. Why did they abandon the application process? Twenty percent thought the process was too lengthy and 25 percent did not understand if they qualified for the job. Nearly half had “other” reasons for not completing the process. Hiring Reforms such as making job applications shorter and easier to read, eliminating narrative Knowledge Skills and Abilities (KSAs) at the beginning of the process, and using Category Rating will encourage more qualified applicants to complete the application process and will increase the applicants’ satisfaction.

#### ***Completers Satisfaction Survey***

- ◆ The *Completers Satisfaction Survey* targets those who complete the application process. This survey also focuses on satisfaction with the application process. Before implementing Hiring Reform, 73 percent of the applicants who completed their applications for a Federal job reported being satisfied with the process. Of these, 71 percent were not Federal employees at the time they applied. Agencies’ efforts in Hiring Reform and streamlining their application process will result in increased applicant satisfaction and more effective outreach to diverse, talented candidates.

#### ***Post-Completer Satisfaction Survey***

- ◆ The *Post-Completer Satisfaction Survey* is a follow-up survey issued 80 days after applying for a position and measures satisfaction with the entire hiring process. As of September 30, 2010, only 47 percent of the applicants who responded to this survey were satisfied with the process, and one third reported that no one ever contacted them after they applied. A Hiring Reform initiative that requires Agencies to keep applicants informed at four different stages of the process will alleviate this gap. Of those surveyed, 12 percent were contacted for an interview and nine percent were offered jobs. Of those offered jobs, 11 percent declined due to a combination of compensation, benefits, and location. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) continues to work closely with Agency Human Resources Offices to ensure timely notification is provided to all applicants.

#### ***Managers Satisfaction Survey***

- ◆ The *Managers Satisfaction Survey* provides information about managers’ satisfaction with their new hires six months after the selection. The September 30, 2010, Managers’ Satisfaction Survey reported that 63 percent of the hiring managers were satisfied with the process. Also, hiring managers reported little involvement in workforce planning and minimal engagement with human resources at the critical early stages of the recruitment process. The 63 percent satisfaction reported in this survey, however, is not representative of USDA because a disproportionate number (83 percent) of the responding managers were from NRCS and RD. Hiring Reform leverages performance measures to provide greater accountability of hiring manager engagement in the critical early stages of the hiring process. The greater the engagement of the hiring manager, the more significant improvement to the overall hiring process and quality of candidates from which to select. Consistent with the goal of the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a diverse, high-performing workforce, OHRM developed the *Diversity Road Map* as a resource for hiring managers to use and has recently appointed a Veterans’ Employment Manager and Diversity Manager so that USDA can effectively reach employee and applicant groups who are underserved.

Both applicants and hiring managers can influence hiring reform changes simply by completing a Satisfaction Survey when received. Your voice, along with the voices of fellow applicants or hiring managers, is being heard! Your participation in completing these surveys, which take only minutes to complete, is invaluable to transforming the Federal hiring process.



## How USDA's New Telework Program Will Work for You

Written by Mika J. Cross, Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager

2011 is set to be a remarkable year for Teleworking across the Federal Government. With the recent passing of the new Telework Enhancement Act in December of 2010, new guidance from OPM on closures and dismissals that includes authorization for "Unscheduled Telework" and USDA's newest Departmental Regulation on the Telework Program now in place, you can bet you will soon see significant changes in the way (and location) that you get your work done.

### ***"We will NOT be business as Usual"***

What changes can you really expect from the new Telework Program?

First you will complete a new, standard USDA Telework Agreement Form within 90 days from publication of the DR as long as your job does not involve daily in-person contact with customers or require use of specialized equipment and/or involvement with classified material. This requirement is to ensure that ALL eligible employees have the opportunity to Telework, provided that they wish to participate in the program and are not under a performance improvement plan or have had disciplinary or adverse actions within the last 12 months.

You can also choose to telework either on a regular and recurring basis (at least one day per pay period) or on an ad-hoc/situational basis. And as long as you have a valid telework agreement, you may be authorized for "Unscheduled Telework" during inclement weather, emergencies, or other instances where the Federal government is closed to the public and when unscheduled leave is otherwise offered.

In addition, Supervisors and Managers must provide justifications to their organizational Telework Coordinators as to the reasons and numbers of employees who are not approved for Telework.

### ***"This is NOT your mother's Telework Program"***

Last year, USDA reported nearly 50,000 positions as eligible to participate in Telework; however, only 10% percent of those positions actually did. This year, the goal is for 50% of all eligible employees to participate in the Telework Program. To reach that goal, we are asking you to join us for National Telework Week by [signing up to telework during the week of February 14-18, 2011](#). USDA is currently listed as an official sponsor for this nationwide initiative geared to encourage organizations and individuals to telework and our own Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), Mr. Billy Milton, and his Deputy CHCO, Dr. Karlease Kelly, are both leading the way by pledging to Telework that week.

Be sure you have a valid Telework Agreement on file and that you speak with your supervisor to participate in kicking off USDA's new Telework Program and National Telework Week- [It's free to pledge and simple to do-](#) (visit <http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek/>)! From the same website, you can even calculate the cost savings you'll realize by taking a break from your commute that week- be sure to Take the Pledge!



## The Spotlight's on YOU!

Jean Knight is a Business Process Analyst with USDA-FSA, currently working on a lengthy detail supporting the MIDAS initiative in Washington, D.C. Her permanent position as a County Executive Director for USDA-FSA in Harford County Maryland normally precludes her from participating in telework, but thanks to the new guidance in USDA's Telework Program, here's what she has to say:



***"When I was first trying to apply for telework, all roads seemed dead ends due to FSA's current telework guidance-***

***which sets eligibility for teleworking based on your permanent position, not the job you currently hold. At present, I am on a two-year detail in Washington, DC doing work for USDA which is perfectly suitable for telework, and my current management was willing to allow it. I have a 2.5 hour commute (one way) and by Fridays of my five day work-week, I am physically drained from getting up at 3:30 a.m. and not getting home until 7:30 in the evening. Now that I am allowed to participate in Telework, I get to sleep in for two more hours and eliminate the commute altogether for that day, which really helps.***

***Working offsite has proven to be invaluable for other reasons as well. At present, I am in a room with 7 other people and a printer that we all share with up to 13 employees on any given day. The constant interruption of folks coming in to get their print job or just the basic office chit chat that occurs in a shared office space sometimes makes it hard to stay focused to say the least. Now that I participate in Telework, I save the projects that really require uninterrupted concentration for the days I work from home. I often can get more done at home in one day then I can in the office with all the interruptions. It really gives me a sense of accomplishment to see just how much I can get done when at home."***

If you'd like to share your feedback about telework, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to USDA Connect.



Written by David A. Dissinger,  
First Sergeant, US Army,  
Retired,  
USDA Veterans Employment  
Program Manager

## USDA SALUTES: HOW WE ARE INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OF VETERANS

### USDA's Goal for veterans:

**10% of new  
hires**

### USDA's Goal for disabled veterans:

**4% of new  
hires**

—USDA Performance  
Goals as determined  
by the Interagency  
Council on  
Veterans Employment,  
September 2010

More veterans, including disabled veterans, are joining the USDA workforce than ever before. In FY 2010, the Department hired 1765 veterans—that is a 41.5 percent increase from the year before. Of those hired, 544 are disabled—increasing the numbers by more than 57 percent from 2009.

This significant increase is due to USDA's commitment to the Veterans Employment Initiative resulting from Executive Order 13518, *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government*. The Executive Order requires that USDA and 23 other Federal agencies create a Veterans Employment office with the full-time responsibility of promoting the recruitment and employment of veterans.

It also established an Interagency Council on Veterans Employment (The Council, co-chaired by the Secretaries of Labor and Veterans Affairs) and charged it with increasing employment of veterans in

the Federal Government and charting a strategic course towards enhancing veterans' employment experience.

In September 2010, the Council announced specific performance goals for each agency in support of the Veterans Employment Initiative in FY 2011. The Council determined that USDA's hiring goal for veterans will be ten percent of all new hires with disabled veterans representing four percent of new hires.

So far, the early results are very encouraging as USDA is already exceeding the Council's hiring goals. According to the National Finance Center, for the first quarter of FY 2011, 13.2 percent of USDA new hires are veterans; and, 4.4 percent are disabled veterans.

As USDA's Veterans Employ-

ment Program Manager (VEPM), one of my key initiatives this year is to create a Veterans Advisory Council with members from each of USDA's Mission

Areas.

The Council will identify issues related to employment, retention, development and advancement of veterans; help identify

barriers to fair employment of veterans; advocate issues and concerns of veterans; assist in raising awareness among employees and management officials of the value of veterans; promote partnerships with veterans' service organizations; and sponsor activities that will promote the value of veterans.

The Charter is written and is now under review by the OHRM. Once approved, an announcement will be published and circulated throughout USDA to solicit members.



FY 2011—1st Quarter

*Percentage of new USDA  
hires who are veterans*

**13.2%**

*Percentage of new USDA  
hires who are disabled  
veterans*

**4.4%**

### THE USDA CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION WEBSITE

Be sure to check out the Department's Cultural Transformation website at [culturaltransformation.usda.gov](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov).

The site is a place where you can find updates on important initiatives and accomplishments, key messages from Secretary Vilsack, and learn about activities in the field.

You'll also be able to provide instantaneous input around the five key areas driving transformation, which are Leadership, Talent Management, Employee Development, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Focus and Community Outreach. The site is a platform for creating dialogue among employees and to enable the workforce to share ideas, discuss hot topics, and gain insight into how USDA is creating a new legacy through the Cultural Transformation initiative.

You will need to use your eAuthentication (eAuth) account to log in to the website. Be sure to bookmark the site and visit it often!



**A new working mother at USDA can return to work with fewer medical issues and can continue to breastfeed by pumping and storing milk in the workplace while away from her new baby.**

New mothers at USDA will now have even more breastfeeding options and support than ever before, thanks to new guidance on Nursing Mothers in Federal Employment, issued by OPM last month.

President Obama delegated authority to OPM for establishing guidance on workplace accommodations in support of executive branch civilian employees who are nursing mothers. OPM is dedicated to helping the Federal Government, the largest employer in America, strive to be recognized as the leader in progressive workplace policies and wellness programs. That is why OPM Director John Berry decided to provide flexible and equitable implementation guidance for Section 4207 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), Pub L. 111-148 adding a new subsection (r) to section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) (codified as amended at 29 U.S.C. 207.)

## So what does this mean for USDA and why should we care?

Medical evidence shows that

breastfeeding benefits both mothers and babies- since nursing mothers can sometimes heal from childbirth more quickly

and breastfed babies are more resistant to disease and infection and experience fewer allergies. This means that a new working mother at USDA can return to work with fewer medical issues and can continue to breastfeed by pumping and storing milk in the workplace while away from her new baby.

USDA will fully support the requirements of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) by providing reasonable break times and suitable places for nursing mothers to express milk for at least one year after the child's birth. This means that ALL employees at USDA, regardless of whether they are exempt from section 7 of the FLSA, will be provided with enough time to express milk while working, as frequently as needed by the mother. The amount and length of breaks will differ from employee to employee, depending on the needs of the individual. And if your organization already provides compensated break times to employees, nursing mothers may use that time to express milk.

Other workplace flexibilities are also available and encouraged for USDA employees who participate in the Nursing Mothers

## ***Special Delivery: New Guidance for Nursing Mothers***

Written by Mika J. Cross, Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager

Program. These include:

- ◆ Telework (temporary, full-time telework arrangements may be suitable as long as the employee has arranged for dependent care during hours when they are required to work)
- ◆ Temporary part-time employment schedules
- ◆ Alternate and Flexible Work Schedules
- ◆ Leave without pay (LWOP)
- ◆ Annual Leave
- ◆ Compensatory Time off
- ◆ Use of accumulated credit hours

### **What about the space and place?**

Organizations across USDA may already have a dedicated Nursing Mothers Room. For those that do not, arrangements should be made to provide a private, clean place (other than a bathroom) that is free from view and intrusion from other coworkers and the public. Some USDA locations do not operate from Federal facilities and, therefore, are not required to create or convert a permanent space. As long as a space is temporarily created or made available when needed and meets the above requirements, USDA will be in compliance with the law. A bathroom, even if private and locked, is not permis-

sible for use as a nursing mother's room. Organizations that do not have any nursing mothers in the workplace are not required to provide a space.

The bottom line is that it makes good business sense to take care of nursing mothers in the workplace- it is the right thing to do- and that is what USDA has committed to do.

For more information on Nursing Mothers in Federal Employment, you may access OPM's [fact sheet on break times for nursing mothers](#).

For additional details about the benefits of breastfeeding, you can access the following online resources: [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [World Breastfeeding Week 2009](#), [La Leche League International](#), and the [World Health Organization](#)





**Do You Know Someone Who Would Be a Perfect Fit at USDA?  
You Could Earn An Employee Referral Bonus Cash Award!**



Written by Patty L. Moore, Acting Director, Executive Resources

In an effort to assist Secretary Vilsack in transforming the USDA workforce into a more diverse and inclusive model workplace reflective of the nation we serve, OHRM has recently amended one of its key Departmental Regulations focused on encouraging employee commitment to bringing in new talent across the Department.

**How, you may ask?**

The Referral Bonus Awards Departmental Regulation is USDA's policy for authorizing cash awards (also known as referral bonus awards) to current employees who refer qualified candidates to fill hard-to-fill positions. Most significant to the change adds the authority to grant an employee with a referral bonus if they are successful in referring candidates who are subsequently hired from traditionally under-represented employment groups, veterans or individuals with a disability.

Agencies and Staff Offices who have elected to participate in USDA's Referral Bonus Award program may compensate employees with a referral bonus award up to \$1000.00 or with 20 hours of time off for each successful referral who is converted to a subsequent new hire, under conditions outlined by the agency in its internal policy. All referral bonuses are paid in lump-sum after the referred new hire employee serves one year with the agency- provided their performance rating has been recorded as successful.

The impact of this newly amended regulation will reinforce the Secretary's commitment to Cultural Transformation efforts designed to eradicate under-representation by encouraging employees to make an investment in helping USDA become a model employer for hiring veterans and individuals with disabilities. The Employee Referral Bonus Award is just one more way that USDA is taking steps to ensure we are all recognized for efforts to create a diverse organization and that we engage the entire workforce to help make this a reality.

Be on the lookout for people you know who would make a good fit and exceptional contribution to your organization and make the referral!

**Charting the Progress of USDA's  
Cultural Transformation**



The Department's emphasis on Cultural Transformation is having a positive impact throughout USDA, but change is coming fast, so it is important that all employees are aware of how this revolutionary transformation will affect them, both collectively and individually.

To obtain a baseline of what employees already know about Secretary Vilsack's Cultural Transformation efforts, a USDA Cultural Transformation Initiative Survey was sent to all employees in December. More than 10,000 of you responded! Here are some of the findings:

65% of respondents believe USDA is committed to establishing a workforce that reflects the U.S. population

69% of respondents say their respective agencies provide workplace flexibilities that promote work/life balance

57.4% report having developed an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in conjunction with their supervisor/manager

98.3% indicate they treat their co-workers with dignity and respect.

The above results reflect just a few of the categories that were part of the total survey. The survey feedback will serve as a baseline to use in comparison with future survey results. As details about specific Cultural Transformation initiatives and action items become known, it's expected that respondents across the Department will indicate a growing knowledge and appreciation of the changes being implemented. For more information about Cultural Transformation at USDA, visit the Cultural Transformation website by logging in with your e-authentication credentials at the following site:

[culturaltransformation.usda.gov](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov).

# USDA Hosts Government-wide Training Event on Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities via Executive Order (EO) 13548

Written by Alison Levy, USDA Disability Employment Program Manager

USDA hosted a training led by a panel of top level experts on employment of persons with disabilities reaching more than 500 key Federal service employees on January 20, 2011 in the Jefferson Auditorium at USDA headquarters. Out of the 500 key Federal service employees that attended, 157 were USDA employees. Information was provided on the Executive Order to Increase Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities, including reasonable accommodation policy, procedures, and resources. Recruitment resources, including an OPM shared register of pre-screened entry level job applicants with disabilities were provided, along with information and guidance on returning injured employees to work.

Chaired by Christine Griffin, OPM Deputy Director, the panel of presenters included leaders from the White House, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and Department of Education.



Dinah Cohen, Director, Department of Defense Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (left), spoke about using Assistive technology throughout the employment lifecycle at the Federal Disability Employment Tour presented by the White House, Office of Personnel Management, and Department of Defense at the United States Department of Agriculture

in Washington, D.C., Thursday, January 20, 2011.

During the speakers time at the podium, a monitor was used to display the topic of their material for audience members who were visually and/or hearing impaired.

Managers continue to seek ways to improve the quality of work life for employees at USDA. One area where significant progress is being made is in establishing workforce management standards. Workforce management standards provide a framework to better manage resources and ensure there are necessary means in place to support annual workforce and succession planning goals.

To assist USDA leadership in effectively managing their organizations and employees, OHRM issued Departmental Regulation (DR) 4020-250-002, *Position Management and Vacancy Control* on October 18, 2010. This policy establishes a process for responsible stewardship and accountability for the strategic management of human resources and will assist managers to effectively achieve their mission within budget.

Until recently, a Department-wide process did not exist for requiring the validation of the need to fill positions nor to assess the most appropriate and effective utilization of current resources. With looming budget deficits, inadequate decision making not only contributes to costly and ineffective use of resources but also to employee perceptions *that more work should be focused on managing basic business needs*. To that end, this new DR requires that managers examine current practices and utilize strategies that support staffing needs and goals for attracting, developing, managing and retaining skilled employees. Managers must also establish and communicate all policies and business processes in standard operating procedures, ensure proper internal controls are established, and that business practices are continuously reviewed for improvement. Through these efforts, we have instilled a sense of responsibility and accountability to better manage and conserve USDA resources.

## Improving Workforce Management Standards Through USDA Employee Feedback : Listening to You Via FEDVIEW

Written by Anita Adkins, Director, HR Policy Division; Christine Jones, Senior HR Specialist, HR Policy Division; and MaryJo Thompson, Senior HR Specialist, USDA Virtual University

In response to concerns identified by employees in the FEDVIEW survey, USDA has developed the "Improving Employee Satisfaction Action Plan" to monitor progress in implementing initiatives that will help to improve employee perceptions. Employee feedback in the following three areas: 1) employee satisfaction with leadership; 2) employee satisfaction with supervisors; and 3) the level of employee engagement reflects that improvement in these areas will have a positive impact on USDA's ability to recruit and retain high performing employees and to deliver USDA's mission more effectively.

OPM is preparing for the administration of the 2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEDVIEW) and will continue the course set in 2010. FEDVIEW, formerly the Federal Human Capital Survey (FCHS), focuses on employee perceptions regarding critical areas of their work life, areas which drive employee satisfaction, commitment, and, ultimately, retention in the workforce. This year is the sixth time OPM is administering the survey, which was first conducted in 2002.

OPM plans to conduct the 2011 survey in the April/May timeframe. These efforts shall contribute to building a high performance culture that will enable the workforce and leadership to address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and meaningfully engage employees as change agents.



### USDA SENIOR TRAINING COORDINATOR BILL SCAGGS IS A PIONEER IN LGBT FEDERAL WORK- PLACE ISSUES



USDA Senior Training Coordinator Bill Scaggs, in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, has provided LGBT education and awareness training to more than 15,000 USDA employees over the past eight years.

Due in large part to Bill's tireless efforts, USDA is recognized as a leader among Federal departments and agencies. Mr. Scaggs has recently started working with OPM and the Federal Executive Institute sharing the sexual orientation and gender identity diversity training he developed at USDA. OPM has called our LGBT work "groundbreaking" and expressed an interest in using it as a model for other federal agencies.

Bill has received numerous awards and recognition for the quality and effectiveness of his training tools and skills, including the 2004 Communicator Award, the 2004 National Association of Government Communicators Award, and the 2005 Telly Award. In 2000, Bill personally received a Secretary's Honor Award.

Bill Scaggs' deep commitment to USDA has created an improved work environment for all employees.

## **USDA IS A FEDERAL LEADER IN CREATING A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER (LGBT) EMPLOYEES**

In June 2009, Secretary Vilsack signed a Departmental Regulation establishing a Special Emphasis Program (SEP) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees.

Since then, USDA has implemented the LGBT SEP by introducing and building the program throughout all levels of the Department.

As a result of the Secretary's directive, each USDA Agency and Mission Area has or will have its own LGBT SEPM to serve alongside with managers from USDA's other special emphasis programs.

New training opportunities are being developed so that the new LGBT SEP managers have the tools and resources they need to best advise management about LGBT workplace issues and concerns. Education and awareness are a vital part of the program so that LGBT employees and their allies can work in a safe and inclusive environment.

Talking about LGBT issues is not always easy because people have different perceptions and feelings based on their respective experiences or beliefs. However, it is imperative that we have these critical conversations about LGBT issues because LGBT inclusion is now part of official USDA policy.



Discrimination or harassment of employees will not be tolerated for any reason, and any employee who experiences discrimination is urged to report it to their supervisor and/or a SEPM or member of their Civil Rights Commission. A key goal of the Cultural Transformation is to ensure that all employees have an inclusive environment which respects the entirety of diversity within the Department's workforce.

Because of the early success of USDA's LGBT Special Emphasis Program, representatives from

the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have met with USDA to gather lessons learned. Senior Trainer Bill Scaggs (see sidebar to the left) and the Departmental Management (DM) LGBT SEPM, Blake Velde, a Senior Environmental Scientist and member of the National Response Team, advised OPM in mid-January on the history of LGBT progress at USDA.

Future collaborations with OPM are planned, with the ultimate goal of having LGBT Special Emphasis Programs across the federal government.

**Written by Perry Stevens,  
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(SEPM). You can contact  
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*"USDA would benefit by updating our Department non-discrimination statement to specifically include 'gender identity and gender expression'. Given our work on developing procedures for employees transitioning on the job and the sheer number of transgender employees in USDA, it is incumbent upon us to catch up to some of the other Departments. OPM includes gender identity in their non-discrimination statement on USAJobs."*

—Blake Velde, Departmental Management LGBT SEPM

### **SECRETARY VILSACK ASSURES BULLIED LGBT YOUTH: "IT GETS BETTER"**



Secretary Vilsack recently added his voice to the "It Gets Better" project, a website that aims to inspire hope for young people facing harassment because they are LGBT or perceived to be LGBT. The Secretary is among dozens of national figures who have submitted videos to the site—ranging

from Daniel Radcliffe and Ellen Degeneres to President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton. The "It Gets Better" project website has had over 15 million visitors view the messages encouraging young people who are being bullied that it really does get better.

The Secretary said he submitted his own video because he wants LGBT youth – especially youth in small-town and rural America – to know that they are never alone. See the Secretary's message here:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/11/29/secretary-vilsack-it-gets-better>

## Cultural Transformation Action Item: EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

### Wharton Executive Training Provides USDA Representatives with Tools and Resources to Develop and Implement Cultural Transformation Training Across USDA.

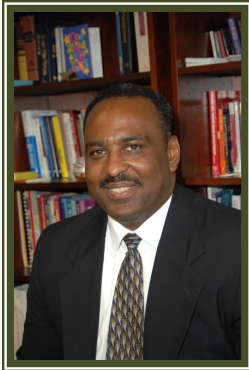
Look for future articles that report progress as USDA Mission Areas, Agencies, and Offices conduct cultural transformation training to foster diversity, inclusion, and customer service throughout our Department.

"The Wharton training was a wonderful experience that not only provided the USDA Training Officers with the foundational tools to shape their Mission Area's cultural transformation training. It was a developmental experience that will follow me my whole career."

—Carmen Jones, Special Assistant, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration

"Being at Wharton was intellectually stimulating and a great opportunity to learn with other colleagues across USDA."

—Michael Colbert  
APHIS



"The Wharton professors provided us with insights, from research and practice, on how to lead agency-wide organizational change."

—Sandra Detter,  
Director, National  
Employee Development  
Center, USDA - Natural  
Resources  
Conservation Service

"This was one of the most enlightening courses that I have attended in recent years. The information I received is immediately transferable to the Cultural Transformation efforts we are now engaged in."

—Arthur Bryant, Forest Service



The Wharton course was a great crash course in organizational change. The in-depth review of the Kotter Change Model is very applicable to our efforts in cultural transformation."



—Caroline C. Thorpe, GIPSA

"As America's premier business school, the Wharton faculty had access to and experience with organizational transformation at multi-national corporations and franchises. The classroom case studies demonstrated that executive leadership teams and their supporting mid-tier management structures had, in fact, caused sustainable change to revive ailing institutions.

The key to the transformation was rooted in all levels taking responsibility for the experience that the customer is left with after each and every interaction with a company employee, agent working on behalf of the company, and/or franchisee representing the brand. Ultimately, the corporate mindset was changed to recognize that customer-centric business performance is only achieved as a result of measuring the combined effect from delivering the services/program benefits PLUS accessing the residual experience the customer was left with after receiving the services/program benefits. If the customer was not left with an experience of value that honored their human dignity, then the business performance was not achieved even though money may have changed hands or technical advice was offered.



The Wharton faculty was masterful in their delivery of this fundamental point at the heart of the Secretary's business case for the Cultural Transformation of USDA. Finally, the Wharton faculty demonstrated, that with sustained leadership, alignment on a common purpose, and the willingness to do a little soul searching, USDA can begin the journey to realize a shift in our internal corporate culture, performance criteria for measuring success, and external customer experience. "

—Steven L. Sanders, OCIO

## USDA AND NAHFE MEET TO DISCUSS PARTNERSHIP

Written by Monshi Ramdass, Director, Diversity, Wellness & Worklife, Mediation, Disability, and Veterans Employment Division

Forging strong partnerships with employee affinity groups and organizations is an integral part of USDA's Cultural Transformation via the Diversity Road Map. Leadership from OHRM met recently with the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE) to discuss building such a partnership.

The two primary topics discussed were establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USDA and NAHFE and increasing the representation of Hispanics in the Senior Executive Service (SES) ranks. The new USDA/NAHFE partnership also discussed ways to improve the USDA Senior Executive Service Career Development Program (SES CDP).

As a result of the meeting, USDA Virtual University and NAHFE, along with USDA's Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE), conducted an informational Teleconference on January 11, 2011.

The Teleconference addressed the SES CDP program to Hispanic GS-14/15s who are aspiring to join the SES ranks. In addition, USDA and NAHFE are in the process of finalizing the MOU to formalize a long lasting relationship dedicated to increasing the underrepresentation of Hispanics within USDA. Finally, NAHFE is making a mentoring program available to USDA employees, and USDA will be partnering with NAHFE on training, employee development, recruitment, and retention.



**From right to left: Al Gallegos, National President NAHFE; Febe Ortiz, Chair USDA's HACE; Oscar Gonzalez, Deputy Director for Intergovernmental Affairs; Javier Lopez, Chair, Washington Chapter NAHFE; William P. Milton, Jr., Chief Human Capital Officer OHRM; Karen Messmore, Director, OHRM; Karlease Kelly, Provost, Virtual University; and Monshi Ramdass, Director, Recruitment and Diversity. (Also present but not pictured were Alma Morales Riojas, President of Mexican-American Women's National Association; and Sylvia Chavez, National Image, Inc.)**



*If you haven't read the first two issues of MyUSDA, here's your chance!*

[MyUSDA Issue 1](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 2](#)

*And be sure to visit [USDA's Cultural Transformation Website](#)*

(<http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov>)  
(e-Authentication required)